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Researcher Wilson, activist Dhawale get bail in Elgar case

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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SC upholds Darshan's bail, to examine State plea

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

In an interim order, the Supreme Court on Friday refused to cancel the bail granted to Kannada actors Darshan Thoogudeepa, Pavithra Gowda, and others in a murder case but agreed to examine the Karnataka government's challenge against it and issued notice.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan issued notice to Darshan and others on the State's plea against the Karnataka High Court's bail order. The State government, said the apex court, apprehended other co-accused would take advantage of the High Court order. Darshan was arrested on 11 June, for killing Renukaswamy. *— PTI*

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Man jumps from 2nd floor of Mantri Mall in City, dies

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

A 55-year-old man died by suicide by jumping from the second floor of Mantri Mall, Malleswaram around 9 pm on Thursday, police said.

The deceased has been identified as T C Manjunath, a resident of Ullal Upanagar in the city. Manjunath climbed over the railings and allegedly jumped from the second floor. He was immediately rushed to a nearby hospital where he was declared brought dead.

Inquiries revealed that he was heavily in debt and unable to pay off the debt because his electronics shop was operating at a loss. A note recovered from his pocket stated that no one was responsible. (Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support) *— PTI*

Amul's 1 litre milk packets get cheaper by Rs 1

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), known for its Amul brand, has announced a reduction in milk prices by Rs 1 per litre nationwide, specifically for one-litre packs. GCMMF's managing director Jayen Mehta described this move as an encouragement for consumers to opt for larger milk packages. In Delhi, the price of Amul Gold milk has been adjusted from Rs 68 to Rs 67 per litre, while Amul Taaza now costs Rs 55, down from Rs 56. Price reduction aims consumers to purchase larger quantities of milk. —PTI

Djokovic walks off mid-match, Zverev reaches final

MELBOURNE, 24 JAN

Spectators booed Novak Djokovic as he left the Australian Open semi-final on set into his match against Alexander Zverev in Rod Laver Arena, Melbourne.

Dealing with a what he said was a torn muscle, Djokovic lost the opener 7-6 (5) when he put a forehand volley into the net, then began shaking his head and immediately walked over to shake Zverev's hand. The 37-year-old Djokovic respond to the jeers with two thumbs-up.

At his news conference, Djokovic said the pain in his taped left leg was "getting worse and worse." He hurt it during his quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz on Tuesday night. This is second time in last four tournaments Djokovic has been unable to finish. *— PTI*

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10 Oppn MPs suspended from Parl meet on Waqf bill

Chairman Jagdambika Pal claims TMC's Kalyan abused him

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Ten Opposition members attending the parliamentary panel meeting on the Waqf Amendment Bill were suspended for a day on Friday amid protests and accusations against Chairman Jagdambika Pal of steamrolling through the proceedings.

While Opposition members accused Pal of reducing the proceedings to a farce and alleged that he was acting on the government's directions, the chairman slammed their conduct aimed at disrupting the meeting.

He accused Trinamool Congress leader Kalyan Banerjee of hurling abuses at him and said he strove to bring the meeting to order, adjourning it twice but in vain.

BJP member Nishikant Dubey moved the motion for suspending the Opposition members which was adopted by the committee,

The suspended members are Banerjee and Nadeem-ul Haque (Trinamool Congress), Mohammad Jawed, Imran Masood and Syed Naseer Hussain (Congress), A Raja and Mohamed Abdullah (DMK), Asaduddin Owaisi (AIMIM), Mohibullah (SP) and Arvind Sawant (Shiv Sena-UBT).

A delegation led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, religious head of Kashmir, at Parliament Annexe on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

The suspension of the Opposition members came on a day when a delegation from Jammu and Kashmir led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the religious head of Kashmir, appeared before the Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill to share their concerns about the draft legislation.

The meeting of the Committee began on a stormy note with the opposition members accusing the chairman of steamrolling through the proceedings and changing the agenda of the meeting at will.

This is for the first time that the Mirwaiz has stepped out of Kashmir valley post abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. *—PTI*

OPTS FOR ORDINANCE

K'taka opts to drop TDR for Palace Grounds

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

The State cabinet on Friday decided against issuing the Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the Mysuru royal family for the acquisition of nearly sixteen acres of land in the Bangalore Palace Grounds, Karnataka Minister HK Patil said.

Instead, the cabinet opted to pass an ordinance to forgo the TDR, he added.

Briefing reporters, State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said issuing TDR for the Bangalore Palace Grounds is inimical to the State's interest.

The enactment of the ordinance will empower the State government to utilise the required amount of land and abandon the proposed proposal, he added.

The minister explained that this ordinance will allow partial or complete withdrawal from any infrastructure project as per any court judgment or any decision taken earlier by the government.

Supreme Court's directive to the Karnataka government to compensate Mysuru royal heirs with Rs 3,000 crore worth of TDR certificates for acquiring 15 acres of land in Jayamahal and Ballari roads has sparked a debate over the delay in fixing compensation rates. The method to arrive at the market value is also laid out in the very act.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The BDA initially valued the land at Rs 1 crore based on the Bangalore Palace (Acquisition and Transfer) Act, 1996. Sources told Salar News that determining market value lies with district deputy commissioners under the Land Acquisition Act, 2013. The revenue department denies involvement in fixing property market rates, which is tied to demand, supply, and economic conditions, below market trends.

—Salar News with PTI

White House: US arrests 538 illegal immigrant criminals

WASHINGTON, 24 JAN

The US has arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals, including a suspected terrorist, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors, the White House has said.

In a series of posts on X on Thursday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the Trump administration also deported hundreds of illegal immigrant criminals via military aircraft.

"The largest massive deportation operation in history is well underway. Promises made. Promises kept," she said.

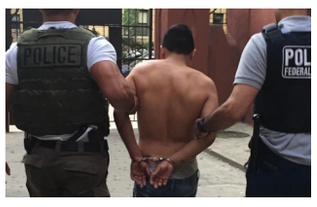

PHOTO: X

Leavitt said, "The Trump Administration arrested 538 illegal immigrant criminals including a suspected terrorist, four members of the Tren de Aragua gang, and several illegals convicted of sex crimes against minors."

Underlining that deportation flights have begun, she asserted that President Donald Trump is "sending a strong and clear message to the entire world: if you illegally enter the United States of America, you will face severe consequences".

The Republican-led House on Wednesday gave final approval to a bill requiring the detention of unauthorised immigrants accused of theft and violent crimes. This marks the first legislation for Trump to sign, with his plans to crack down on immigration. *—PTI*

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R-DAY REHEARSALS IN CITY

Indian Gurkhas take part in full dress Rehearsal ahead of R-Day celebrations at Manekshaw Parade Ground on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

8 killed in blast at Maharashtra ordnance factory

BHANDARA, 24 JAN

Eight workers were killed and five others injured as a blast ripped through a unit of the ordnance factory in eastern Maharashtra's Bhandara district on Friday morning, officials said.

At the completion of rescue operations after nearly eight hours, the final death toll stood at eight, said a district official. The impact of the blast was so powerful that the building where it took place was completely destroyed. Residents of three villages felt the ground shaking. *—PTI*

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Gold breaches ₹83K mark for first time

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Gold prices extended the rally for the eighth consecutive session and climbed Rs 200 to breach the psychological level of Rs 83,000 per 10 grams for the first time in the national capital on Friday amid aggressive buying triggered by global market uncertainties. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity rose Rs 200 to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 83,100 per 10 grams. The yellow metal of 99.5 per cent purity also appreciated by Rs 200 to hit a record high of Rs 82,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 82,500 per 10 grams. Additionally, silver climbed Rs 500 to Rs 94,000 per kg on Friday. The white metal finished at Rs 93,500 per kg in the last trading session. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Patanjali recalls 4T of chilli powder

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

India's Food Safety and Standards Authority (FSSAI) has prompted the recall of a four-tonne batch of Patanjali Foods' red chilli powder due to non-compliance with food safety regulations. The batch, weighing 200 grams and bearing the batch number AJD2400012, exceeded permitted limits of pesticide residue.

The recall was initiated by Patanjali Foods, a prominent player in the Indian fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. In a statement, the company's chief executive, Sanjeev Asthana, confirmed the action and urged consumers to return the product and claim a full refund.

Asthana stated that the company is conducting a thorough review of its agricultural produce suppliers and has taken steps to bolster quality control measures to prevent similar situations in the future. FSSAI's directive came under the Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulations, 2011.

Patanjali Foods, led by Baba Ramdev, posted a 21 per cent increase in standalone net profit for the September quarter to Rs 308.97 crore.

The company is one of the top FMCG players in the country. *—PTI*

BODY FOUND IN KALKERE LAKE

B'deshi woman allegedly raped, head crushed in City

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

In a tragic incident, a 28-year-old woman was allegedly sexually assaulted and brutally murdered by unidentified assailants in Bengaluru on Friday. To conceal her identity, the perpetrators reportedly crushed her head with a boulder.

The body was recovered from Kalkere lake here on Friday morning, police said.

The victim, originally from Bangladesh, was a resident of Ramamurthy Nagar and had been working as a domestic helper at DSR Apartment, just three kilometres from her home, for the last six years. Her husband, Suman, is an employee of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), and the couple lived in Kalkere with their three children.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) for Bengaluru East, D Devaraj, revealed that the woman had been reported missing since Thursday evening. She informed her husband she would return home within half an hour, but when she had not arrived by 9pm, he began to search for her.

After contacting her employer, who confirmed she left work around 6.30pm, Suman filed a missing person report with the Ramamurthy Nagar police. The search continued without success until Friday morning when locals alerted the police to a body found in an isolated area approximately one kilometre from her workplace.

Joint Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru East, Ramesh Banoth, stated that initial investigations suggest the woman was attacked after leaving work. A forensic team and a dog squad were deployed to the scene, and the body has been sent to East Point Medical Hospital for an autopsy. Police are reviewing CCTV footage to identify suspects. *—Salar News*

65-yr-old gangraped by 4 in Bihar for refusing to give cigarette

Lakhisarai, 24 JAN

A 65-year-old woman was allegedly gangraped by four persons over refusal to give them cigarettes in Bihar's Lakhisarai district, police said on Friday. Two of the accused have been arrested and a manhunt was launched to nab the others, they said. "The incident took place on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday when four people went to the woman's house in Nawabganj area asking for cigarettes. When she refused, they dragged her to a nearby field… and allegedly committed the crime," SP Ajay Kumar told PTI. "On the basis of statements of her family members, a case was immediately registered… and two accused people were arrested on Thursday. *—PTI*

CBI busts ₹350 cr countrywide crypto ponzi scam

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The CBI has conducted search operations across seven locations after registering a case of Rs 350 crore crypto Ponzi scam against seven persons, officials said. It is alleged that they had conducted transactions of over Rs. 350 crores. The accused persons were allegedly running seven separate modules based in the cities of Delhi and were taking money from gullible investors promising investments in cryptocurrencies.

On Thursday, the agency swooped down at locations in Delhi, Jharkhand, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan. The CBI seized digital virtual assets totalling USD 38,414 in the cryptocurrency wallets of the accused persons. *—PTI*

Malegaon primary healthcare centre shut, villagers suffer

BIDAR, 24 JAN

In Malegaon village, a Hobli centre near the Telangana border, local residents are expressing their frustration over the inadequacy of services at the primary health centre, which exists in name only. With doctors rarely present and treatment almost unobtainable, the facility has become a source of disappointment for the community. Despite being a Zilla Panchayat Constituency, the primary health centre lacks a dedicated building, and its doors remain locked most of the time. Villagers often face difficulties accessing medical care, especially as nearby Telangana offers a Gram Panchayat Centre in Sadari village, located 15 km from Bidar. According to social activist Guru Amadalapada, there is typically only one doctor and four staff members available, and their presence is unreliable. He lamented, "If a doctor comes, it's a stroke of luck for patients. Those in need of care, especially pregnant women and the elderly, struggle to find proper treatment." *—Salar News*

Teen missing after leaving 'spiritual quest' note in City

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

A 17-year-old boy, Mohit Rishi, has gone missing after leaving a note claiming he is on a 'spiritual quest' to renounce the 'world of greed'. The incident has left his family deeply worried as police intensify efforts to locate him. Mohit, a BCom student at a private college in Vidyaranyapura, reportedly left home around 4pm on 16 January, leaving behind his mobile phone. In his note, he stated, "I am leaving this world of lies to search for the truth. I am the son of Lord Vishnu; don't look for me." After an extensive but unsuccessful search, his parents filed a missing person complaint. *—Salar News*

7 arrested in JD(S)' Hanumanthu murder case

MYSURU, 24 JAN

Metagalli police have arrested seven individuals in connection with the murder of JD(S) leader Belavattha Hanumanthu. The accused, identified as Vinod, Mohan, Yogesh, Santosh, Antony, Venugopal, and Manju, are residents of Belavetta. The brutal killing took place on the intervening night of 22 December when 57-year-old Hanumanthu was attacked with machetes while riding his bike near Belavezha village in Mysuru taluk. Following the incident, the assailants fled the scene. The Metagalli police registered a case and launched an investigation that led to the arrests on Thursday, after which the suspects were remanded to judicial custody. During interrogation, the accused admitted that there was a land dispute involving Hanumanthu and Manju. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Kharge calls for action on Central University proposals

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday demanded the Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to expedite the approval of key proposals related to Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi, which are currently pending before the Centre. In a letter to the Minister, he noted that the Central University of Karnataka serves as an hub of education for students not only from Kalaburagi and the seven districts of the Kalyana Karnataka region but those from entire Karnataka and several areas of neighbouring states. Kharge said that the University plays a vital role in addressing educational disparities and fostering opportunities for growth. *—PTI*

SC reserves treasurer post for women in B'luru Bar

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Exercising its plenary powers, the Supreme Court on Friday reserved the post of treasurer in Bengaluru advocates association for women lawyers.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh exercised its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution observing the election for the bar body was scheduled on 2 February and the nomination process was over.

The court invoked its powers saying it was "high-time" to provide women reservation in different elected bodies of advocates and there were no express provisions in the memorandum and by-laws earmarking seats for women candidates of the association.

The bench directed the high-powered committee constituted to oversee the election and the chief returning officer for the bar body polls to extend the date for inviting nominations and if required, the election to be deferred for a few days.

PHOTO: X

However, such a decision will be at the discretion of the committee and the chief returning officer, it added.

The top court ordered the committee and the returning officer to also consider adequate representation of the women advocates in the governing council of advocates' association of Bengaluru to ensure at least 30 per cent elected members of the council were women candidates with 10 years of practice experience.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by a woman lawyer who sought the implementation of directions of women reservation issued in case of Delhi High Court Bar Association, where the court last year directed for reserving seats for women lawyers including the post of treasurer.

The bench observed the Karnataka High Court had noted there was no express provisions in the memorandums and by-laws of Advocate Association Bengaluru for reserving seats for women lawyers and said the apex court, which was dealing with similar issues could pass appropriate orders. *—PTI*

Govt mulls strict microfinance laws

Belagavi family was locked out over unpaid dues

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

State government is contemplating bringing in stringent laws to rein in microfinance companies, in light of reports of people dying by suicide due to the "atrocities" of loan recovery agents, state Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Friday.

He noted that while there are provisions in the law to recover money, there are also laws to protect borrowers.

"There are several reports from our department highlighting the inadequacies in the existing laws. If stricter regulations are required, the government will introduce them," Parameshwara said.

He added that the government has instructed microfinance companies to stop harassing borrowers.

In Belagavi's Tarihal village, a family was dragged out of their home, and the house was locked due to non-payment of an instalment. With the timely intervention of Women and Family Welfare Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar, the matter was resolved. She also provided the family with the necessary ration supplies.

Cheluvarayaswamy **PHOTO: X**

- In Belagavi's Tarihal village, a family was dragged out of their home, and the house was locked due to non-payment of an instalment. With the intervention Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar, the matter was resolved

The family had taken a loan of Rs5 lakh from a microfinance company but could only repay Rs3 lakh due to domestic expenses and the additional financial burden of a pregnancy.

According to Parameshwara, borrowers are required to give undertakings when taking loans, but banks often make them sign multiple documents without explaining the purpose, leaving borrowers unaware of what they are agreeing to.

He further noted that Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil has brought the issue to their attention, and even Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has spoken about it.

JD(S) leader and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy criticised the government for failing to address the menace of microfinance companies harassing people.

"Is there even a Home Minister in Karnataka?" he remarked. Speaking to reporters, he urged the Karnataka government to take decisive action against the growing menace of microfinance institutions exploiting poor and middle-class citizens.

—Salar News with PTI

N Cheluvarayaswamy **PHOTO: ANI**

Sriramulu wanted to join Congress, says minister

MYSURU, 24 JAN

Mandya district in-charge minister N Cheluvarayaswamy stated on Friday that discussions regarding former minister B Sriramulu potentially joining the Congress party occurred during the April Parliament elections.

However, he confirmed that Sriramulu did not join and expressed uncertainty about his future decisions.

Addressing reporters, Cheluvarayaswamy responded to JDS leader CS Puttaraju's comments regarding the disqualification of JDS-BJP supported directors in cooperative societies. He dismissed the need for Puttaraju's suggestions, asserting that the State cooperative department is acting within legal boundaries.

He also reminded Puttarayaswamy of his government's earlier decision to disqualify four Congress-supported cooperative society directors during previous district elections, which facilitated BJP's control over the District Cooperative Central Bank. *—Salar News*

'CLEAN CHIT' TO CM

BJP questions Lokayukta's integrity

LoP R Ashoka and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: ANI**

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has raised doubts about the integrity of the Lokayukta's investigation into the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) scam following media reports suggesting that the police wing of the ombudsman has exonerated Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his family.

Siddaramaiah, along with his wife Parvathi BM and brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy, are implicated in a case initiated by the Lokayukta police at the directive of a special court. The Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly, R Ashoka, claimed that the Lokayukta's investigation is merely a façade aimed at protecting the Chief Minister. "This is not a Lokayukta report, but a 'Siddaramaiah Bachao report,'" Ashoka asserted.

BJP state president BY Vijayendra also condemned the Lokayukta police, suggesting that the clean chit was granted under pressure from Siddaramaiah. "No investigative agency makes findings without basis," Vijayendra stated, expressing concern that the clean chit was hastily arranged following the Enforcement Directorate's evidence submission.

The allegations suggest that Parvathi obtained 14 upscale plots in Mysuru in exchange for her three acres and 16 guntas of land acquired by MUDA. Siddaramaiah claimed ignorance of clean chit, stating, "I don't know about it. How can I comment on something I am not aware of?"

Meanwhile, senior Lokayukta police officials have clarified that no final report has been completed, cautioning against assumptions regarding any clean chit. *—PTI*

SC refuses to cancel Darshan's bail

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

In an interim order, the Supreme Court on Friday refused to cancel the bail granted to Kannada actors Darshan Thoogudeepa, Pavithra Gowda, and others in a murder case but agreed to examine the Karnataka government's challenge against it and issued notice.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan issued notice to Darshan and others on the state's plea against the Karnataka High Court's bail order.

PHOTO: PTI

The State government, said the apex court, apprehended other co-accused would take advantage of the high court order.

Senior advocate Sidharth Luthra along with advocate Anil Nishani, appearing for the state government, submitted that the high court completely "white-washed" the whole case.

He expressed apprehension and said the other co-accused would take benefit of the high court bail order.

The Karnataka High Court on 13 December, 2024 granted bail to the actor Darshan and others.

Karnataka High Court granted Darshan an interim bail on medical grounds for six weeks on 30 October. *—PTI*

KALA DHWANI 2025

Vibrant folk artists from Punjab light up the stage with captivating dance performances at the 'Kala Dhwani' cultural event at Chitrakala Parishat, Bengaluru, on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'Local babus can't allow filming in forests'

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Karnataka Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre has directed officials to make it mandatory to obtain permission from the "appropriate" authorities for any kind of filming in the State's forest areas.

At present, even local-level authorities are issuing permits, he added.

In an order dated 20 January, addressed to Additional Chief Secretary to the Government, Forest, Biology and Environment Department, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Force, Khandre said, as of now, only the Deputy Conservator of Forests is authorised to permit shooting in the forest area. He also highlighted recent media reports on the potential problems arising from filming in forest areas and the seriousness of crimes associated with it.

Early this week, many reports highlighted how while shooting for 'Kantara Chapter 1', also referred to as 'Kantara 2', in and around Gavibetta, Herur village, of Hassan district, the film crew had violated rules. *—PTI*

STRINGENT MEASURES IMPLEMENTED

Over 1,000 police personnel deployed for R-Day security

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Ahead of the Republic Day celebrations on 26 January at Manekshaw Parade Ground, the police have implemented stringent security measures to ensure a safe and smooth event.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Friday announced the measures during a press briefing, highlighting the deployment of personnel and the installation of security infrastructure.

For the past 15 days, police personnel have been stationed at the venue as a precautionary measure. Additionally, all hotels, lodges, guest houses, and other accommodations are being closely monitored for any suspicious activity.

The event, which will feature a flag hoisting ceremony, parade, and cultural programmes, will be inaugurated by the Governor of Karnataka.

Special forces and tech deployed

Children with Indian Tricolour flags ahead of R-Day Celebrations at Manekshaw Parade Ground, on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

In addition to the personnel, 10 KSRP and CAR platoons, two fire engines, two ambulances, four reserve vehicles, a Quick Reaction Team, a D-SWAT team, and an Incident Response Vehicle have been deployed. Garuda units will remain on standby, top cop Dayananda said.

Entry gates and public guidelines Entry to the event at Manekshaw Parade Ground will be regulated through designated gates, with access based on the type of pass issued. Police request public cooperation to ensure event's success. *—Salar News*

1. **All attendees must be seated by 8.30 am. Entry will be restricted after this**
2. **Attendees are advised not to bring unnecessary baggage or personal items**
3. **Suspicious items or individuals should be immediately reported to police personnel on duty**
4. **Prohibited items include cigarettes, lighters, sharp objects, knives, liquid paints, video and still cameras, narcotics, fireworks, explosives, weapons, alcohol, water bottles, and food items**

Metro to begin services early on R-Day with 20 extra trips

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

In preparation for the anticipated increase in foot traffic due to Republic Day celebrations and the Lalbagh Flower Show, the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has announced that metro services will commence one hour earlier than usual on 26 January.

On Republic Day, all metro trains, including those from Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station (Majestic), will begin operations at 6am instead of the regular 7am. This adjustment aims to accommodate the higher number of commuters expected for the festivities.

To further manage the influx of passengers, BMRCL will operate an additional 20 trips on both the Green and Purple Lines. This strategic move is designed to facilitate easier travel for attendees heading to the Republic Day events at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC) in Madavara, as well as to the highly popular Lalbagh Flower Show.

To assist visitors to the flower show, BMRCL has introduced a special flat-rate paper ticket costing Rs 30. These tickets will be valid for travel from Lalbagh Metro Station to any other station and will be available for purchase from 10am to 8pm. Importantly, no tokens will be issued during this time at Lalbagh Station, and payments for these tickets must be made in cash. *—Salar News*

Over 570 cases filed in Delhi for MCC violations

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

More than 570 cases of alleged violations have been registered in Delhi since the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for the 5 February Assembly polls came into force on 7 January, an official said on Friday. A total of 19,065 people were arrested under various legal provisions, including those under the Excise Act, during this period, according to a statement. The police have tightened border checkpoints and conducted crackdowns on illegal activities, including the smuggling of arms, liquor and drugs. They have confiscated 284 illegal firearms and 394 cartridges, the statement said. It has also seized 46,682 litres of liquor worth more than Rs 1.3 crore, 119.51 kg of drugs worth over Rs 20 crore and more than 1,200 banned injections. —*PTI*

3 militants held, arms recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, 24 JAN

Security forces arrested three members of banned outfits in separate operations in Manipur's Thoubal and Imphal West districts, police said on Friday. Two active members of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) were arrested on Thursday from Uningkhong in Thoubal, they said. Pistols, ammunition and cash were recovered from their possession. In another operation, a member of the outlawed Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) was arrested from Langol Type III in Imphal West on Wednesday, a police officer said. —*PTI*

Guv Ravi's tirade boosted DMK support: Stalin

CHENNAI, 24 JAN

Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi's remarks against the DMK has only led to more support for the ruling party, DMK President and Chief Minister MK Stalin said on Friday. Stalin was addressing party workers on the occasion of cadres from Seeman-led Naam Tamizhar Katchi (NTK) joining the DMK. Without naming the NTK or its founder, he said his party would not be deterred by criticism of the Dravidian ideology and would continue to harp on the Dravidian model of governance. Only in the face of it, the DMK continued to grow and the disparaging remarks of Seeman brought hordes of NTK cadres to the DMK, he said, adding that Seeman and his party are opposed to the Dravidian ideology, he said —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Varanasi priest booked for remarks on Mulayam

VARANASI, 24 JAN

A defamation case has been filed against a Hanuman Garhi priest in a Varanasi court for allegedly making objectionable remarks about Samajwadi Party (SP) founder late Mulayam Singh Yadav, a lawyer said on Friday. Priest Mahant Raju Das had recently taken to social media platform X, calling for an offensive action on a statue of Yadav installed in a camp supported by SP workers at the Maha Kumbh, said advocate Prem Prakash Yadav, who filed the case. "Raju Das made disrespectful comments about Mulayam Singh Yadav, the champion of the poor, which has deeply hurt our sentiments. The matter was taken to the Varanasi civil court, which admitted the case and fixed 17 February for hearing. —*PTI*

Delhi HC denies special Assembly for CAG reports

HC flagged AAP govt's delay in tabling the reports

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Friday refused to direct a sitting of the state assembly for tabling several Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports on governance, saying holding a special sitting barely a few days away from elections was "impractical".

Justice Sachin Datta however underlined that tabling of the audit reports was mandatory under the Constitution and directed the reports to be placed in the assembly by Delhi government after the elections as expeditiously as possible.

"In such a situation (when the current legislative assembly is about to expire), it would be impracticable to hold a special sitting of the assembly...

Justice underlined that tabling of the reports was mandatory PHOTO: PTI

Given that the legislative assembly is at the fag end of its current term, the examination and scrutiny by the PAC (public accounts committee) will now take place only after the newly-elected assembly is re-convened," the order said.

The court is not inclined to accept the prayers of the petitioners that a mandamus be issued to the speaker for summoning a special session of the legislative assembly at this stage, it added. It observed an "inordinate delay" by the AAP government in laying the CAG reports in the assembly and the timeline revealed a "disdainful disregard" of its constitutional obligations.

The court directed once the legislative assembly was constituted and summoned pursuant to the elections, steps should be taken by Delhi government under the procedural rules for tabling the reports as expeditiously as possible. Opposition leader Vijender Gupta and BJP MLAs -- Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan -- filed the petition last year and sought a direction to the speaker to call a sitting of the assembly for tabling the CAG reports. —*PTI*

Cong vows ministry for Poorvanchalis

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Congress on Friday announced that there will be a separate ministry and budget for Poorvanchalis in Delhi if the party is elected to power in the upcoming assembly elections.

The Congress leaders alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has destroyed Delhi's world-class infrastructure and turned it into a garbage. They accused the AAP government of indulging in corruption to the tune of Rs 382 crore in the healthcare sector.

The party's Bihar unit president Akhilesh Prasad Singh said if Delhi has become a world-class city, the Poorvanchalis have as much role in it as others. Delhi residents from eastern UP, Bihar and Jharkhand are referred to as Poorvanchalis. They constitute a sizable percentage of the voters who can decide the fate of candidates in due to which the Congress, BJP and AAP woo them during the elections. —*PTI*

Centre, Delhi cops plan to kill Kejri: AAP

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

AAP on Friday accused BJP-led Centre and Delhi Police of conspiring to "kill" its supremo Arvind Kejriwal and urged the Election Commission (EC) to restore his security cover provided by the Punjab Police.

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and her Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann said they have written to the EC, demanding "fair grounds" to the AAP in the 5 February Delhi Assembly polls and the restoration of Kejriwal's security cover given by the Punjab Police, along with an audit of "life-threatening" attacks on him.

Meanwhile, a day after Punjab Police personnel deployed in the security of Kejriwal were with-drawn, he dubbed it as "pure politics". At the press conference on Friday, Kejriwal also took a dig at the BJP and Shah over the law and order situation in Delhi due to the activities of gangsters. BJP leader Ravneet Singh Bittu asked why a person whose party's woman MP was assaulted at his residence required Z-plus security. —*PTI*

Akhilesh dares Yogi to drink Yamuna water

LUCKNOW, 24 JAN

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav on Friday took a veiled jibe at UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who slammed AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal for the state of Yamuna's cleanliness. Yadav asked if Yogi could sip water from the Yamuna in his own state in Mathura.While campaigning for the BJP for the Delhi assembly polls on Thursday, Adityanath alleged Kejriwal, the former chief minister of Delhi, has committed a sin by turning the Yamuna into a "dirty drain".The UP CM, whose cabinet took a dip in the Sangam in Prayagraj on Wednesday, asked if Kejriwal and his ministers could take a bath in the Yamuna. "He should answer if he has any moral courage," Adityanath said.In a seeming response to his remarks, Yadav wrote a post on X but did not name anyone. —*PTI*

Jan Suraaj Party to field 70 EBCs in Bihar Assembly polls

PATNA, 24 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

A Making a strong pitch for "political representation in proportion to population", Jan Suraaj Party founder Prashant Kishor on Friday promised to field 70 candidates from the extremely backward classes (EBC) in elections to the 243-strong Bihar assembly.

The political strategist turned activist was addressing a function organised here on the birth anniversary of former chief minister Karpoori Thakur, an EBC icon on whom Bharat Ratna was conferred last year.

"The Jan Suraaj Party believes that political representation, in proportion to population, must be ensured. Hence, we will give tickets to 70 candidates of the extremely backward classes", said Kishor.

He was speaking at the Miller High School ground, situated at a stone's throw from the offices of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), his principal ally BJP and the main opposition party, the RJD.

Without mentioning these parties by name, Kishor said, "These three organisations can together not field a total of 70 EBC candidates. But Jan Suraaj Party will not just give tickets to 70 EBCs, but also bear the expenses of those who may have potential but lack the resources to fight an election".

"Improving public education is essential but it would take some time to clear the mess. So, until things look up, the Jan Suraaj Party promises to bear the expenses of poor students who might otherwise be unable to afford it," said Kishor. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CJI to hear ex-Haryana MLA's plea for EVM verification policy

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

A Supreme Court bench led by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna is set to hear a plea from former Haryana minister and five-time MLA Karan Singh Dalal, who is advocating for a formal policy on the verification of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

The matter was brought before a bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan, who indicated that the case would be presented alongside similar petitions to the Chief Justice. Dalal, along with co-petitioner Lakhan Kumar Singla, is calling for compliance with a prior Supreme Court ruling in the 'Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India' case.

The petition claims that the EC has yet to establish such a verification policy, leaving the process ambiguous. —*PTI*

AGAINST UGC NORMS

Water cannons being used to disperse AISF activists during their protest at Raj Bhavan against the Draft University Grants Commission (UGC) Regulations 2025, in Thiruvananthapuram, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

M'rashtra to have 3 DyCMs: Raut

Uddhav won't go solo in local polls, says Pawar

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Friday took a dig at Shiv Sena chief and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and claimed a rift in the latter's party, saying Maharashtra will have a third deputy chief minister from the fold.

The Rajya Sabha MP said the activities behind the scenes were such that the state could have three deputy chief ministers in the future.

"No one should take Eknath Shinde seriously. He is a deputy chief minister. He was the chief minister yesterday. He will not be there tomorrow because Maharashtra is getting a third deputy chief minister from the same party. He (Shinde) should think about this," he said. He further alleged that Shinde was serving the "enemies" of Maharashtra, referring to the party's ally BJP.

Raut's remarks have come days after he claimed that Industries Minister Uday Samant could split the Shinde-led Sena, as he has the support of 20 MLAs. Maharashtra currently has Shinde and NCP chief Ajit Pawar as deputy chief ministers. —*PTI*

PUNE, 24 JAN

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) president Sharad Pawar on Friday expressed the hope that Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray will not take any extreme stand after the latter hinted at his outfit going solo in the upcoming local body elections in Maharashtra.

He said though Thackeray has expressed his opinion on fighting local body polls, other constituents of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) feel the issue should be resolved amicably among allies. The MVA consists of the Congress, NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena (UBT).

The former Union minister said in Kolhapur city that the Maharashtra government signing MoUs with Indian companies at Davos during the World Economic Forum and projecting them as investment was misleading.

"Uddhav Thackeray had earlier also expressed sentiments about going solo in the elections. Two days ago, he had a detailed discussion with me regarding this and what he said yesterday (Thursday) during a Shiv Sena 'melava' (gathering) reflects his opinion. But I do not think he will take any extreme stand," said Pawar.

Thackeray on Thursday said his party wanted to contest the upcoming local body polls independently. —*PTI*

MP bans liquor shops in 17 holy towns

KHARGONE, 23 JAN

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Friday said his government has decided to shut down liquor shops in 17 holy towns in the state.

The decision was taken at the cabinet meeting held during the day in Khargone, he added.

The 17 towns consist of one municipal corporation, six nagar palikas (municipalities), six nagar parishads (urban councils) and six village panchayats.

"In the first step to bring

about an end to drinking in the state, liquor vends in 17 holy towns will be shut down. These shops will not be shifted elsewhere. Liquor shops will be completely shut in Ujjain Municipal Corporation limits," the chief minister told reporters.

The areas in which liquor vends will be shut down are part of Datia, Panna, Mandla, Multai, Mandsaur and Maihar nagar palikas, as well as Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, Mandleshwar, Orchha, Chitrakoot and Amarkantak nagar parishads, Yadav informed.

The six village panchayats are Salkanpur, Barman Kala, Linga, Kundalpur, Bandakpur and Barmankhurd, the CM added.

The liquor ban in the 5-kilometre periphery of the Narmada river will continue, Yadav said —*PTI*

'FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION'

MEA flags protests in UK against 'Emergency

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal addressed reports of disruptions faced by the screening of the film 'Emergency' in the UK, as well as other pressing issues including the presence of Khalistani terrorist Pannun at Donald Trump's inauguration.

Jaiswal remarked on the ongoing obstructions faced by the film, stating, "We have also seen several reports on how the film 'Emergency', which was being screened in several halls, was being obstructed. We consistently raise concerns with the UK government regarding incidents of violent protests and intimidation by anti-India elements. Freedom of speech and expression cannot be applied selectively, and those obstructing it must be held accountable." He expressed hope that the UK authorities would take appropriate measures against those responsible for these disturbances. "Our High Commission in London remains in regular communication with our community members for their safety and welfare. We expect the UK side to take strong appropriate action in this matter," he added. In response to queries about the circulation of videos showing Khalistani terrorist Pannun at Trump's inauguration, he affirmed that India continually raises such concerns with the US regarding security and anti-India agendas. "Whenever there is an anti-India activity, we take up such matters with the US," Jaiswal reaffirmed India's commitment to addressing concerns stemming from activities perceived as hostile to its interests. —*ANI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

YSRCP Gen Secy Vijayasai Reddy to quit politics

PUNE, 24 JAN

In a surprise move, YSRCP Rajya Sabha member and party general secretary V Vijayasai Reddy on Friday announced his decision to quit politics and said he will be resigning from his parliament membership on 25 January. Further, he said agriculture will be his future.

Reddy, who is also the party's floor leader in the Upper House, said he is not joining any other political party.

He is the fourth YSRCP Rajya Sabha member to resign from the party after its rout in the 2024 Assembly elections.

Reddy, who was one of the key figures in former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP in the state, said he was indebted to YS Rajasekhar Reddy family, which has supported him for four decades and three generations.

He also thanked YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for giving Rajya Sabha opportunity twice and also the latter's wife YS Bharati for elevating him to a higher pedestal. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

PHOTO: ANI

Saif attacker's custody extended till 29 Jan

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

A Mumbai court on Friday extended till 29 January the police custody of the Bangladeshi man arrested for allegedly stabbing Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan at his home during a robbery attempt last week. Police produced Shareeful Islam Shehzad Mohammad Rohilla Amin Fakir, 30, before a magistrate's court in Bandra at the end of his previous remand. They sought his custody for seven more days from the court, arguing further investigation into some crucial aspects of the case was required. Meanwhile, Md Ruhul Amin Fakir, father of Mohammed Shariful Islam defended his son and called into question the allegations. According to Fakir, the images from CCTV footage showing a suspect with long hair do not match his son's usual appearance. *—PTI*

Teenage girl with earphones run over by train

PALGHAR, 24 JAN

A 16-year-old girl, Vaishnavi Rawal, has died after being struck by an express train in Palghar district of Maharashtra. The incident occurred at 1.10pm on Thursday near Saphale and Kelve Road railway stations. Officials believe she failed to hear the approaching train due to her earphones. Desperate efforts to save her were made, but she was pronounced dead on arrival at a nearby hospital. Her body has been sent for a post-mortem examination, and a case of accidental death has been registered. The incident echoes a recent tragedy in Jalgaon district, where 12 passengers lost their lives after jumping from a train and being struck by another on adjacent tracks. *—PTI*

Case filed against film director, producer in Kerala

KOCHI, 24 JAN

Film director B Unnikrishnan and producer Anto Joseph are under police investigation for allegedly threatening producer Sandra Thomas. The Ernakulam Central police registered the case on 16 January, following a complaint from Thomas. In her statement, she alleged that there are concerted efforts to oust her from the industry after she approached the Hema Committee, established to tackle issues faced by women in the Malayalam film sector. Thomas also claimed she faced insult at a meeting of the Producers' Association in Kochi. Her prior expulsion from the Kerala Film Producers' Association had already ignited controversy. Unnikrishnan, who serves as general secretary of the Film Employees Federation of Kerala, denied the allegations, asserting that Sandra has misunderstood the situation, while she affirmed her intention to pursue legal action. *—PTI*

3 Vadodara schools closed after bomb threat via email

VADODARA, 24 JAN

Three schools belonging to an education society in Vadodara, Gujarat, declared a holiday on Friday after one of them received a bomb threat via email, which was later determined to be a hoax. Following the threat, extensive searches were conducted at all three schools, but nothing suspicious was discovered. The incident began when the principal of Navrachana International School, located on Bhayli–Vasna Road, reported the unsettling email to the police control room on Friday morning. The email claimed that a bomb with a timer had been placed in the drainage system of the Navrachana school. This prompted the school management to suspend classes. *—PTI*

8 killed, 5 injured in blast at Bhandara ordnance factory

Explosion shakes ground at three surrounding villages

BHANDARA, 24 JAN

Videograb from a footage released by the NDRF shows rescue operation in progress after a blast at an ordnance factory in Bhandara district of Maharashtra on Friday PHOTO: PTI

Eight workers were killed and five others injured as a blast ripped through a unit of the ordnance factory in eastern Maharashtra's Bhandara district on Friday morning, officials said.

At the completion of rescue operations after nearly eight hours, the final death toll stood at eight, said a district official.

"As per preliminary information, eight persons were killed and seven injured in the blast," Union minister Nitin Gadkari had said earlier.

The impact of the blast was so powerful that the building where it took place was completely destroyed. Residents of three villages in the vicinity felt the ground shaking, said a local man whose 20-year-old cousin was among the deceased.

Pictures taken immediately after the explosion showed a huge cloud of smoke rising above the site.

The blast took place around 10.30am at the factory in Jawahar Nagar, officials said in a statement. It led to fire and subsequent building collapse, and a National Disaster Response Force team was deployed immediately for a rescue operation, it said.

Specialised equipment was being used for the rescue operation and efforts were on to ensure the safety of all persons, an NDRF statement said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on X, "Deeply saddened to know about the blast at Ordnance Factory at Bhandara, Maharashtra. My condolences to the bereaved families. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured." All efforts were being made to provide assistance to the affected people, he said.

Earlier, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had said that 13 or 14 workers were stuck at the site. Kolte also said 13 or 14 people were working in the unit at the time of the incident. According to police and district authorities, the explosion occurred in the "LTP section". *—PTI*

AFTER 6 YEARS

Sudhir Dhawale & Rona Wilson PHOTO: X/@SUCHITRAV

Researcher Wilson, activist Dhawale get bail in Elgar case

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Researcher Rona Wilson and activist Sudhir Dhawale, accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, were released on bail from a Navi Mumbai prison on Friday, more than six years after they were arrested.

The duo walked out of the Taloja jail in neighbouring Navi Mumbai at around 1.30pm on completion of bail formalities before the special NIA court presiding over the case, over a fortnight after they were granted bail by the Bombay High Court.

The HC granted the bail on 8 January, noting they had been in jail since 2018 and the trial in the case, in which anti-terror act UAPA has been invoked, was yet to start.

Besides Dhawale and Wilson, 14 other activists and academicians were arrested in the case. Eight of them – Varavara Rao, Sudha Bharadwaj, Anand Teltumbde, Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira, Shoma Sen, Gautam Navlakha and Mahesh Raut – have been granted bail till now.

Among them, Raut still remains in jail as the NIA's appeal against his bail is pending before the Supreme Court.

Jesuit priest and activist Stan Swamy, one of the accused, died in 2021 while lodged in judicial custody.

The case pertains to provocative speeches allegedly delivered at the Elgar Parishad conclave held in Pune on 31 December, 2017, triggering violence at Koregaon-Bhima village the next day. *—PTI*

CBI for early hearing of RG Kar case plea

Both West Bengal government and the CBI are seeking capital punishment for convict Sanjay Roy PHOTO: PTI

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

The Calcutta High Court has said it will hear the CBI's appeal seeking the death penalty for RG Kar Hospital rape-murder convict Sanjay Roy on 27 January.

A division bench presided by Justice Debangsu Basak and Justice Md. Shabbar Sashidi said it will also hear a prayer by the West Bengal government over admission of its appeal with a similar plea.

The division bench had on January 22 said it would hear the CBI, the victim's family, and the convict through their lawyers before deciding on the admission of the appeal filed by the state government.

The CBI had opposed the state's right to file an appeal in the case, claiming that it was the prosecuting agency, and had the right to prefer the appeal on the grounds of inadequacy of sentence.

Seeking capital punishment for Roy, the state's Advocate General Kishore Dutta stated before the court that apart from the prosecuting agency, the victim's family and the convict, the state can also challenge the quantum of punishment awarded on the ground of inadequacy. *–PTI*

SAMBHAL DEMOLITION CASE

SC lists contempt petition for next week

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday announced it will hear a plea next week regarding contempt proceedings against authorities in Sambhal for allegedly breaching its ruling on property demolitions. Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih adjourned the matter after the petitioner's lawyer, Mohammed Ghayoor, requested a delay due to personal issues with the arguing counsel.

The plea, submitted by advocate Chand Qureshi, claims that local authorities violated a Supreme Court verdict from 13 November, 2024, which established nationwide guidelines requiring a show-cause notice and a 15-day response period before demolishing properties. The petition alleges that officials in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal demolished part of the petitioner's property on 10-11 January without any notice or opportunity for the family to respond.

According to the petition, the family possessed all necessary documents, including approved maps, but the authorities proceeded with the demolition regardless. The plea emphasises that these actions were arbitrary and in violation of the Supreme Court's directive.

In its November ruling, the Supreme Court asserted that demolitions should not occur without due process, defining any such actions as "high-handed and arbitrary." The court stipulated that demolitions could not take place without proper notification, highlighting the need for adherence to legal protocols. *—PTI*

Excavation work underway at an old Baori located in Chandausi area of Sambhal PHOTO: ANI

Apex court axes PIL seeking scrapping of TDS

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Supreme Court of India has declined to entertain a public interest litigation (PIL) aimed at abolishing the tax deducted at source (TDS) system under the Income Tax Act. Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar stated that the TDS framework is commonly implemented across many countries and described the PIL as "very badly drafted."

Petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay has been advised to pursue his plea in the Delhi High Court instead. The PIL, filed by advocate Ashwani Dubey, argued that the TDS system is "arbitrary and irrational," infringing upon fundamental rights, including the right to equality. *—PTI*

Violence at WB hospital over inadequate service

BURDWAN, 24 JAN

Trouble broke out at a super-speciality hospital in Bardhaman, West Bengal on Thursday night when a dispute over alleged inadequate medical services escalated into violence, police said. A group of people attacked doctors, hospital staff and police personnel during the altercation, they said. On Friday morning, police detained six persons in connection with the violence.

The incident started after a youth from Swetipalli in Shaktigarh was admitted to the hospital with a leg injury. Dissatisfied with the treatment, his family members and friends reportedly engaged in a heated argument with hospital authorities.

Hospital superintendent Shakuntala Sarkar said, "The on-duty police officers tried to defuse the situation, but the group assaulted them, doctors and staff. They , and partially vandalised hospital property."

Five police personnel were injured in the scuffle. One was admitted to the hospital for treatment, while the others were discharged after first aid, officials added. *—PTI*

Woman killed by tiger in Wayanad; sparks protests

WAYANAD, 24 JAN

A 47-year-old woman was killed in a tiger attack at Mananthavady in Wayanad, on Friday morning, sparking protests by locals in the area. The woman was mauled by the tiger while she was out plucking coffee in the morning, the district administration said.

The body was found by forest officials during a routine patrolling, Kerala Forest Minister A K Saseendran said. He assured all efforts will be made to captur tiger. *—PTI*

FIITJEE centres shut in North

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Several FIITJEE coaching centres across North India have abruptly closed, leaving hundreds of students and parents distressed ahead of crucial board and entrance exams. The closures in Noida, Ghaziabad, Bhopal, Varanasi, Delhi, Patna and Meerut, follow a mass resignation of teachers over unpaid salaries, officials said.

The Meerut centre was the latest to shut after attempts to bring in teachers from Noida failed. Parents have lodged police complaints, accusing the institute of failing to provide notice or refunds.

PHOTO: X

Protests erupted outside the closed branches, with parents demanding accountability.

One parent alleged, "I invested Rs 6 lakh, and they assured us the centres would continue. Even after teachers left, they claimed classes would go on."

Another parent, who recently paid Rs 4 lakh, said teachers confirmed they hadn't received salaries for months.

The crisis coincides with the JEE Mains Session-1 exams, compounding stress for students. FIITJEE, founded in 1992 by IIT Delhi graduate DK Goel, operates 72 centres in 41 cities and has over 300 staff.

Reports suggest fund crunch and administrative issues, including breach of licensing and fire safety norms, have worsened the situation. The closures have left students without guidance during a critical academic period, with parents demanding immediate solutions. *—Agencies*

Autorickshaw driver held for raping woman

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

A 20-year-old woman was raped and assaulted by an autorickshaw driver at a beach in neighbouring Palghar district, police said on Friday.

The police have arrested the accused for the assault that took place at Vasai Beach earlier this week, an official said.

The official said the woman was spotted near Goregaon railway station here on Wednesday morning, and when questioned, she informed the police about the rape.

The woman was taken to a government-run hospital, the official said.

The woman, in her statement, has alleged that she met the accused autorickshaw driver at Vasai railway station premises, and he took her to the beach, where he assaulted and raped her, the official said.

He said a case was registered at Vanarai police station, and multiple teams were formed to apprehend the accused.

The police teams launched a search between Churchgate and Virar railway stations and nabbed the 32-year-old accused from a slum in Khairpada Valiv, the official said. *—PTI*

GANGA 'DIP SAFE'

UP braces for 10cr devotees at Maha Kumbh

PRAYAGRAJ, 24 JAN

The Uttar Pradesh government has implemented measures to ensure a smooth and safe experience for the devotees attending the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. As over eight crore pilgrims have taken a holy dip at the Sangam, officials are anticipating a record 10 crore devotees for the Mauni Amavasya 'Amrit Snan' on 29 January.

To deal with the influx of devotees, the government has set up a 12-kilometer-long ghat, with additional infrastructure such as river barricading, water police, watch towers, improved lighting and toilets. Officials have been instructed to encourage devotees to bathe at the ghat closest to their entry point and return from there without moving to other zones.

The administration has also taken steps to prevent overcrowding at the ghats, with evacuation teams deployed to ensure safe evacuation of devotees. Key resources such as ropes, loud hailers, whistles and watch tower teams will be used to maintain crowd control. Temporary holding areas, parking facilities and overnight stay arrangements will be established to further manage the crowd.

Devotees take the holy dip at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, authorities have been working tirelessly to ensure the Ganga river is "dip-safe" for the pilgrims. Measures include daily sample testing of river water, round-the-clock separation of flowers from water, a 200-kilometer temporary drainage system, and the use of state-of-the-art technology to deal with human waste. According to the authorities, the river water is safe to take a holy dip, with the Biological Oxygen Demand level being within the prescribed limit. *—PTI*

SAY CHEESE!

Artists click selfies during full dress rehearsal for Republic Day Parade 2025, in Amritsar, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Trump and the row over Birthright Citizenship

US President Donald Trump's executive order denying US citizenship to the children of parents living in the country illegally is to curb unlawful immigration *PHOTO: PTI*

US President Donald Trump's executive order denying US citizenship to the children of parents living in the country illegally faced the first of what will be many legal tests on Thursday. It didn't fare well.

A Justice Department lawyer had barely started making his arguments in a Seattle courtroom when US District Judge John C Coughenour began blistering him with questions, calling the executive order "blatantly unconstitutional." Coughenour went on to temporarily block it pending further arguments.

Here are some things to know about the decision and the lawsuits challenging Trump's order.

Birthright citizenship is the principle that someone born in a country is a citizen of that country. In the United States, it's enshrined in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which states: "All people born or naturalised in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." It was ratified in 1868 to ensure the citizenship of former slaves after the Civil War.

Critics of unfettered immigration have argued that provides an incentive for people to come to, or remain in, the US illegally: They know that if they have children in the US, those children will be citizens, who might later petition for them to become legal permanent residents.

In an effort to curb unlawful immigration, Trump issued the executive order just after being sworn in for his second term on Monday. Trump's order drew immediate legal challenges across the country, with at least five lawsuits being brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups. A lawsuit brought by Washington, Arizona, Oregon and Illinois was the first to get a hearing.

The judge's ruling was a temporary restraining order. It blocked the administration from enforcing or implementing Trump's order nationally for the next 14 days. Over the next two weeks, the sides will submit further briefings on the legal merits of the executive order. Coughenour scheduled another hearing Feb. 6 to hear arguments on whether to issue a preliminary injunction, which would block the executive order long term while the case proceeds.

In the meantime, some of the other cases challenging the order are also getting underway. The next hearing is in a case brought in Maryland by CASA, a nonprofit that supports children who have been abused or neglected in foster care. That's set for Feb. 5 at US District Court in Greenbelt.

Another lawsuit, led by New Jersey on behalf of 18 states, the District of Columbia and San Francisco, and a challenge brought in Massachusetts by the Brazilian Worker Center do not yet have hearings scheduled. Aside from arguing the executive order's constitutionality, the states say the order would subject all the children affected by it to deportation and make many of them stateless. It would strip them of their rights and render them unable to participate in economic or civic life, the states argue. Coughenour did not detail his reasoning during Thursday's hearing, but his assertion that the order is "blatantly unconstitutional," as well as point-blank questioning of DOJ attorney Brett Shumate — and his lack of questions for Washington's assistant attorney general, Lane Polozola — suggested he agreed with the states' arguments. The states say it's well-settled that the 14th Amendment guarantees birthright citizenship and that the president lacks authority to determine who should or should not be granted US citizenship at birth.

"I've been on the bench for over four decades. I can't remember another case where the question presented was as clear as this one is," Coughenour told Shumate.

The Department of Justice later said in a statement that it will "vigorously defend" the president's executive order.

"We look forward to presenting a full merits argument to the Court and to the American people, who are desperate to see our Nation's laws enforced," the department said. Newly elected Washington Attorney General Nick Brown — a former Seattle US attorney — said after Thursday's hearing that he wasn't surprised by Coughenour's reaction to the "absurdity" of the executive order. "I've been in front of Judge Coughenour before to see his frustration personally," Brown said. "But I think the words that he expressed, and the seriousness that he expressed, really just drove home what we have been saying.... This is fairly obvious." *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

'250M kids missed school in 2024 due to bad weather'

UNICEF said the world's schools and education systems are largely ill-equipped to deal with the effects of extreme weather *PHOTO: PTI*

At least 242 million children in 85 countries had their schooling interrupted last year because of heatwaves, cyclones, flooding and other extreme weather, the United Nations Children's Fund said in a new report Friday.

UNICEF said it amounted to one in seven school-going children across the world being kept out of class at some point in 2024 because of climate hazards.

The report also outlined how some countries saw hundreds of their schools destroyed by weather, with low-income nations in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa hit especially hard.

But other regions weren't spared the extreme weather, as torrential rains and floods in Italy near the end of the year disrupted school for more than 9,00,000 children. Thousands had their classes halted after catastrophic flooding in Spain.

While southern Europe dealt with deadly floods and Asia and Africa had flooding and cyclones, heatwaves were "the predominant climate hazard shuttering schools last year," UNICEF said, as the earth recorded its hottest year ever. More than 118 million children had their schooling interrupted in April alone, UNICEF said, as large parts of the Middle East and Asia, from Gaza in the west to the Philippines in the southeast, experienced a sizzling weekslong heatwave with temperatures soaring above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

"Children are more vulnerable to the impacts of weather-related crises, including stronger and more frequent heatwaves, storms, droughts and flooding," UNICEF executive director Catherine Russell said in a statement.

"Children's bodies are uniquely vulnerable. They heat up faster, they sweat less efficiently, and cool down more slowly than adults. Children cannot concentrate in classrooms that offer no respite from sweltering heat, and they cannot get to school if the path is flooded, or if schools are washed away."

Around 74 per cent of the children affected in 2024 were in middle- and low-income countries, showing how climatic extremes continue to have a devastating impact in the poorest countries. Flooding ruined more than 400 schools in Pakistan in April. Afghanistan had heatwaves followed by severe flooding that destroyed over 110 schools in May, UNICEF said.

Months of drought in southern Africa exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon threatened the schooling and futures of millions of children.

And the crises showed little sign of abating. The poor French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean off Africa was left in ruins by Cyclone Chido in December and hit again by Tropical Storm Dikeledi this month, leaving children across the islands out of school for six weeks. Cyclone Chido also destroyed more than 330 schools and three regional education departments in Mozambique on the African mainland, where access to education is already a deep problem.

UNICEF said the world's schools and education systems "are largely ill-equipped" to deal with the effects of extreme weather. *—PTI*

Flooding ruined more than 400 schools in Pakistan in April 2024 *PHOTO: PTI*

Tennis & turmoil: Aus Open faces rowdy fans and on-court drama

The unruly behaviour is seen as a reflection of the post-pandemic world, where a lot of people are still adjusting after being cooped up *PHOTO: X*

Things are somewhat out of control at the Australian Open this year, and that's got only a little to do with the results on the courts.

Yes, there were some upsets, including Madison Keys eliminating No. 2 Iga Swiatek in the women's semifinals Thursday night. It also was the first time since 1990 that three teenagers beat top-10 men's seeds at a Grand Slam tennis tournament. The loser of one of those matches, Daniil Medvedev, got fined USD76,000 for behaving badly. Last year's women's runner-up exited in the first round.

Ho, hum. The real fuss is happening elsewhere. The rowdy fans, for one thing, continuing a recent increase in loud and unruly folks in the stands at Grand Slam tennis tournaments, whether calling out during points or between points, or booing lustily — even when Novak Djokovic stopped playing in the men's semifinals because of a leg injury — or causing such a ruckus at a court equipped with a bar that an adjacent match was moved to a different venue.

"It's been like that for a couple of years. ... Sometimes I think it's disrespectful," said Pat Rafter, a retired Australian player who won two U.S. Open titles and reached the No. 1 ranking in the late 1990s.

"Sometimes, I think it's just part of the game, the transition of this generation, and that's what they want. This is the Australian Open."

Also drawing attention: Some folks involved in television coverage at Melbourne Park, whether those whose interviewing skills were lampooned on social media — and described as " embarrassing " by Ben Shelton, the American who reached the men's semifinals — or the commentator who insulted Djokovic during an on-air appearance before eventually apologizing days later after the 24-time Grand Slam champion demanded it.

So what is going on, exactly? Why is everyone so angry at what long has been known as the Happy Slam? It's hard to pinpoint one reason. And, in truth, it could just be coincidental, rather than a reflection of Australian society or any sort of trend in modern-day tennis.

Then again, maybe it's just a reflection of the post-pandemic world, where a lot of people are still adjusting after being cooped up and unable to attend sporting events — or go much of anywhere, actually — for a while.

Or perhaps it's an increasing willingness on the part of the athletes to call out what they consider bad behavior and give as good as they get, something American Danielle Collins did after hearing boos when she defeated an Australian player and Djokovic has done more than once.

It also might stem from attempts by tennis leaders to, as Rafter noted, attract new fans and, especially, younger fans.

That's seen in various ways, from allowing movement in the stands while play is in progress — something unheard of for decade upon decade — to permitting coaching during contests and making it part of the spectacle with courtside boxes or trying to meet kids where they are by posting feeds on YouTube of real-time animated streams of matches made to look like a video game.

Could be working: As the event heads to Sunday's conclusion, 10 of the first 12 days had record attendance, including more than 97,000 on site on 17 January the highest one-day number in tournament history.

"It's fun in Australia. It's a place where you see people coming from all over the world, which creates a great atmosphere. Sometimes, I think ... it can go a little bit over the line. There are traditions in tennis that are important that make tennis unique," said Patrick McEnroe, an ex-player and former captain of the U.S. Davis Cup team.

"You have to move with the times," McEnroe continued, "but I think there's something about the quiet that happens in a great tennis match that's unique."

This whole phenomenon is not unique to Melbourne Park, though. Unusual scenes have been playing out in the stands at Roland Garros, Flushing Meadows and — gasp! — even the All England Club.

During the 2022 Wimbledon final, Nick Kyrgios got into a back-and-forth with one particularly bothersome spectator, who later sued him. Crowds at the U.S. Open have been notoriously rambunctious for a while, especially when the drinks flow at night, including the jeering that drowned out the trophy ceremony when Naomi Osaka defeated Serena Williams in the 2018 women's final. Last year, French Open organizers stopped letting ticket-holders bring alcohol to their seats after one player, Belgian David Goffin, complained about having gum spat at him.

"It's becoming soccer," Goffin said.

"Soon there'll be smoke bombs, hooligans and fights in the stands. I think it's getting ridiculous." *—PTI*

Judge blocks Trump's citizenship move

Executive order signed by President is 'blatantly unconstitutional', says John Coughenour

WASHINGTON DC, 24 JAN

A federal judge has blocked President Donald Trump's executive order seeking to end the granting of American citizenship to children born to foreigners in the US.

US District Judge John Coughenour issued a temporary restraining order preventing Trump from carrying out his order aimed at ending birthright citizenship.

"This is a blatantly unconstitutional order," Coughenour said in court, according to The Associated Press.

Twenty-two states have joined lawsuits challenging Trump's order as a violation of the 14th Amendment's citizenship clause. Longstanding Supreme Court precedent confirms that, under the amendment, virtually all children born on US soil are entitled to American citizenship.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office Thursday, Trump vowed to appeal. "There's no surprises with that judge," the President said.

President Donald Trump holds up a signed executive order relating to science and technology in the Oval Office of the White House **PHOTO: PTI**

In light of the California fires, Trump called on federal officials to draft plans to route more water to the crop-rich Central Valley and densely populated cities in the southern part of the state. He later he threatened to withhold federal disaster aid unless California leaders change the state's approach on water.

Meanwhile, a powerful US lawmaker has criticised the policy affecting children of H-1B visa holders who "age out" their immigration status upon turning 21.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Children of H-1B visa holders who turn 21 before their parent secures a Green Card can lose their dependent status and age out of the ability to obtain a permanent resident card. A Green Card allows a non-US citizen to live and work permanently in America. *—Agencies*

I think Russian President Vladimir Putin should make a deal with Ukraine. I think, from what I hear, Putin would like to see me. And we'll meet as soon as we can. I'd meet immediately. Soldiers are being killed on the battlefield

—Donald Trump, US President

Trump signs exec order to declassify JFK files

WASHINGTON DC, 24 JAN

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order seeking to declassify files on the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Asserting that the victims' families and the US people deserve to know the truth about these assassinations, the order directs the Director of National Intelligence to present a plan within 15 days for the "full and complete release" of all John F. Kennedy assassination records.

It also directs the Director of National Intelligence to immediately review the records on the Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. assassinations and present a plan for their full and complete release within 45 days.

"That's a big one. A lot of people are waiting for years, for decades. And everything will be revealed," Trump said after he signed the order.

The order stated that continued withholding of the John F. Kennedy records is long overdue and not in the public interest. "Although no Act of Congress directs the release of information pertaining to the assassinations of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., I have determined that the release of all records in the Federal Government's possession pertaining to each of those assassinations is also in the public interest," Trump said in the order. *—PTI*

Trump reveals plans to reach out to North Korea's Kim Jong Un

WASHINGTON DC, 24 JAN

US President Donald Trump said he plans to reach out to North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un following his return to the White House.

Trump was asked about his plans for Kim during an interview on Thursday and whether he would "reach out".

"I will, yeah. He liked me," Trump said.

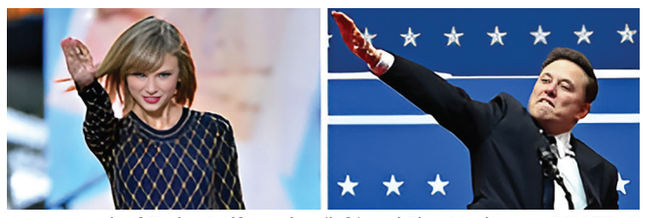
Trump and Kim had an unusually strong rapport during the president's first term in office for two nations at odds since the Korean War some 70 years ago. Trump has previously described their relationship as "very, very good" and has referred to Kim as a "smart guy" in the media.

During his first term in office, Trump met with the North Korean leader on three separate occasions between 2018 and 2019.

In 2019, he made history as the first sitting US president to visit North Korea since a 1953 armistice brought a de facto end to the Korean War.

Following his re-election in November, Trump's team said they were weighing reopening "direct talks" with Kim.

Trump's close relationship with Kim, however, has put him at odds in the past with South Korea, a US treaty ally, and potentially even members of his own cabinet as he heads into his second term in office. *—Agencies*



A screengrab of Taylor Swift waving (left) and Elon Musk **PHOTO: X**

Musk drags Taylor Swift into Nazi salute row

Justifying his Nazi salute-like gesture at US President Donald Trump's inauguration Tesla CEO Elon Musk has now dragged pop star Taylor Swift into the row, retweeting a post comparing a screengrab of Swift waving to the infamous Nazi salute.

However, dragging Swift into the debate did not sit too well with her fans. Even non-fans of the singer were quick to jump to her defence. "I mean, I dislike Taylor as much as the next person, but unjustifiably calling her a nazi is way too much." *—Agencies*

Google omits Biden from US presidents' list

The Independent reports that former US president Joe Biden's tenure at the White House was completely omitted from Google search queries "US Presidents", "United States Presidents" and "US Presidents in order".

The list showed President Donald Trump to have served as the last two presidential terms with Biden's name nowhere to be found. Google, however, acknowledged the mistake and said it had been caused due to some "data error". *—PTI*

Sri Lankan govt drastically cuts ministerial perks

COLOMBO, 24 JAN

The Sri Lankan government has announced stringent new regulations limiting the benefits accorded to its ministers, a move aimed at addressing public concerns over political privilege and accountability. A circular from President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Thursday restricted Cabinet and deputy ministers to two official vehicles and set new caps on their fuel allowances and monthly payments for office, residential and phone expenses. The support staff for a Cabinet minister is limited to 15 and a deputy minister is limited to 12. Family members or relatives cannot be appointed as private secretary, coordinating secretary, media secretary, or public relations secretary. The regulations come amidst the ongoing debate forcing President Mahinda Rajapaksa to leave official residence and forego personal security. *—PTI*

Robbery charges on 2 Indian-origin youths in US

NEW YORK, 24 JAN

Two Indian-origin persons are among five people charged in the US with carrying out a robbery at gunpoint at the home of a business owner in front of his young children. Bhupinderjit Singh, 26, and Divya Kumari, 26, were the Indian origin persons among the five charged with perpetrating a gunpoint home invasion robbery in Orange County, New York. They were arrested and presented in White Plains federal court before United States Magistrate Judge Victoria Reznik, the US Attorney's Office, Southern District of New York, said. They were charged with one count of robbery conspiracy, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, and one count of robbery, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. *—PTI*

US Indian gets 30 months jail for duty evasion

WASHINGTON DC, 24 JAN

An Indian man who ran jewellery companies in New York has been sentenced to 30 months in prison for evading customs duty for importing jewellery worth more than USD 13.5M and for illegally processing over USD 10.3M through an unlicensed money transmitting business. Acting US Attorney Vikas Khanna said Monishkumar Kirankumar Doshi Shah, 40, of Mumbai and Jersey City, New Jersey, previously pleaded guilty before US District Judge Esther Salas to a two-count information, charging him with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and operating and aiding and abetting the operation of an unlicensed money transmitting business. Shah is convicted for evading duties for shipments of jewellery from Turkey and India to the US between December 2019 and April 2022. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

UK warns of Iran forcing ships into its waters

JERUSALEM, 24 JAN

A warning has gone out to seafarers in the Persian Gulf over what appear to be attempts by Iran's Revolutionary Guard to compel ships to enter Iranian waters. While Iran has a history of harassing and impounding vessels, it hasn't directly launched many such attacks recently. Instead, the Iran-backed Houthi rebels have been attacking ships since November 2023, a campaign that now appears to be winding down after the ceasefire in Gaza. Meanwhile, Palestinians displaced from the war-battered north are facing an agonising wait before the days-old ceasefire allows them to see what remains of their homes. *—PTI*

Israelis wait for next hostage release

TEL AVIV, 24 JAN

Relatives of hostages still being held by militants in Gaza called on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday to ensure all remaining captives are freed, while also appealing to US President Donald Trump to continue pressing for their release.

As a fragile six-week ceasefire between Israel and Hamas entered its sixth day, Israelis waited anxiously for the names of the next four hostages who will be released from among the more than 90 still held in Gaza.

In the Palestinian enclave, civilians in the central and southern part of the Gaza Strip hoping to return to the remnants of their home in the battered north faced an agonising wait.

A Palestinian stands beside a torched car in the aftermath of an attack by Israeli settlers in the West Bank village of Jinsafut **PHOTO: PTI**

Israel believes about a third, or possibly as many as half, of the more than 90 hostages still in Gaza have died. Hamas has not released definitive information on how many captives are still alive or the names of those who have died.

In the first phase of the ceasefire deal, 33 hostages are expected to be released gradually in return for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

The first three Israeli hostages were freed in exchange for 90 Palestinian prisoners on Sunday, the first day of the ceasefire that has halted the 15-month war that has devastated Gaza. More than 47,000 Pal-estinians have been killed in Gaza and wide swaths of the territory have been destroyed.

According to the deal, on Friday Hamas is to announce the names of the next four hostages to be re-leased on Saturday, after which Israel will also release a list of which Palestinian prisoners will be freed. *—PTI*

Russian drone kills three in Kyiv region

KYIV, 24 JAN

At least three people have been killed in a Russian drone attack near Ukraine's capital.

The interior ministry said on Friday that drone debris killed two men and a woman in the overnight attack on the central Kyiv region, which damaged a residential apartment building, eight houses, commercial buildings and several cars.

Meanwhile Ukraine's military launched a barrage of drones into Russia, claiming to have hit oil facilities in Ryazan and a microelectronics production plant in Bryansk.

Russian authorities had earlier said air defence systems intercepted and destroyed 121 drones launched by Ukraine overnight.

The drones were downed over 13 Russian regions, including Moscow, Kursk, Bryansk, Belgorod and the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula, according to the defence ministry.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said the drones had been intercepted at several locations around the capital.

Russian news agencies quoted the federal aviation agency as saying that two Moscow airports – Vnukovo and Domodedovo – were handling flights after suspending operations. A total of six flights were redirected to other airports. *—Agencies*

UK teen gets 52 yrs for triple murder

SOUTHPORT, 24 JAN

A teenager who murdered three young girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport, UK, last year has been sentenced to more than 50 years in prison, Al Jazeera reported.

Axel Rudakubana, 18, was sentenced on Thursday, with the judge noting that he had attempted to carry out a mass murder of innocent, happy children.

Despite his age, the judge ruled that Rudakubana must serve a minimum of 52 years before being considered for parole, stating that it was likely he would never be released.

Rudakubana, 17 at the time of the attack, killed the three young girls – aged six, seven and nine years – at a dance class in Southport in last July. In addition to the murders, Rudakubana wounded eight other children and two adults.

On Monday, he admitted to the killings and pleaded guilty to 10 counts of attempted murder, producing ricin, and possessing an al-Qaeda training manual.

Prosecutors revealed that Rudakubana had no political or religious motive for his actions but was instead obsessed with violence and genocide, reported Al Jazeera.

Born in Cardiff to Rwandan Christian parents, Rudakubana's motives remain unclear. *—ANI*

AFG WOMEN HAIL ICC MOVE AGAINST TALIBAN LEADERS

KABUL, 24 JAN

An Afghan women's group on Friday hailed a decision by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to arrest Taliban leaders for their persecution of women.

The ICC's chief prosecutor Karim Khan on Thursday announced he had requested arrest warrants for two top Taliban officials, including the outfit's leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Since they took back control of the country in 2021, the Taliban have barred women from jobs, most public spaces and education beyond sixth grade.

In a statement, the Afghan Women's Movement for Justice and Awareness celebrated the ICC decision and called it a "great historical achievement."

"We consider this achievement a symbol of the strength and will of Afghan women and believe this step will start a new chapter of accountability and justice in the country," the group said.

The Taliban government has yet to comment on the court's move.

Also Friday, the UN mission in Afghanistan said it was a "tragedy and travesty" that girls remain deprived of education. *—PTI*

FROM BOOM TO BUST

3M food joints closed in China in 1yr

BEIJING, 24 JAN

Nearly 3M restaurants, cafes, and other food service establishments in China have closed in the past year, according to Radio Free Asia (RFA).

A significant number of these closures have been because of bankruptcies, with even some of the most popular restaurant chains shutting down hundreds of their locations to cut costs.

In early December, Zhenghao Da Da, a leading Taiwanese chicken chain, went viral on Weibo after announcing it would close all of its stores in China, starting with its flagship location at Shanghai's New World City Plaza mall, RFA reported.

RFA highlighted an article from the industry website Hongcan, stating, "'Contraction' and 'stores closing' were the new buzzwords for the catering industry in 2024. The negative news just kept on coming, and the sense of chill was overwhelming."

A significant cause for these closures is bankruptcy **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

The closures have hit every segment of the industry, from fine dining to cafes, bakeries, hot pot chains, snacks, and fast food outlets, RFA reported.

Even upscale Western fine-dining restaurants have fallen victim to bankruptcy, fleeing owners, and unpaid wages, which the article described as "extremely embarrassing."

One notable example is the Beijing-based Michelin-starred Italian restaurant Opera BOMBANA, which shut down in April 2024, still owing wages to its staff and money to suppliers, RFA reported.

According to a list of high-profile closures compiled by Redcan, L'Atelier 18, a French restaurant on the Bund in Shanghai featuring a Three-Michelin-star chef, closed after just six months of operation.

Similarly, Paul Pairet's Roodoodoo also shut down less than a year after opening, RFA reported.

Snack, baked goods, and beverage businesses have also been impacted. *—ANI*

The city's air quality index was 185 on Friday **REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE**

Bangkok shuts 350 schools over severe air pollution

BANGKOK, 24 JAN

More than 350 schools in Bangkok have been forced to close due to air pollution, authorities said.

The city was struggling with hazardous air quality since midweek. Authorities gave schools permission to close and advised people to work from home after the air quality index (AQI) hit 159, said IQAir, a partner of the UN Environment Programme.

An AQI reading above 100 is considered unhealthy, while a reading above 200 is rated very unhealthy.

On Friday morning, when authorities announced the closure of about 100 additional schools, the AQI stood at 185.

As of 11am local time, Bangkok ranked as the eighth most polluted city in the world, behind Dhaka, Lahore, Kathmandu, Karachi, Delhi, Mumbai and Ho Chi Minh City, IQAir said. *—Agencies*

India's forex reserves decline by $1.8 billion

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

India's forex reserves dropped by USD 1.88 billion to USD 623.983 billion in the week ended 17 January, the RBI said on Friday. Earlier, the overall kitty declined by USD 8.714 billion to USD 625.871 billion in the week ended 10 January, the Reserve Bank of India said. The reserves have been on a declining trend for the last few weeks, and the drop has been attributed to revaluation along with forex market interventions by RBI to help reduce volatilities in the rupee. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September. Gold reserves increased by USD 1.063 million to USD 68.947 billion. India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 74 million at USD 4.122 billion. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 22P to close at 86.22 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Rupee appreciated 22 paise to close at 86.22 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as a decline in the US dollar index supported investor sentiments. Forex traders said weak crude oil prices also supported the local unit, while sustained foreign fund outflows weighed on the local unit. Traders further noted that the upcoming Union Budget will play a crucial role in shaping market sentiment and the rupee's trajectory. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a strong note at 86.31 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.16 and a low of 86.36. It finally closed at 86.22 (provisional), rising 22 paise against US dollar from previous close. *—PTI*

Lupin gets USFDA nod for generic HIV drug

NEW DELHI, 24 KAN

Drug firm Lupin on Friday said it has received approval from the US health regulator to market a generic HIV medication in the US market. The company has received tentative approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) under the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for Abacavir, Dolutegravir and Lamivudine tablets, the Mumbai-base drug maker said in a statement. The company's product is a generic equivalent of ViiV Healthcare Company's Triumeq PD tablets for oral suspension, it added. This product would be manufactured at the drug firm's Nagpur facility and will be supplied to low-and middle-income countries, it said. Shares of Lupin were trading 0.78 per cent down at Rs 2,133.40 apiece. *—PTI*

Tata Electronics acquires 60% stake in Pegatron Tech

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Tata Electronics Pvt Ltd (TEPL) on Friday announced the acquisition of a controlling 60 per cent stake in Pegatron Technology India. The company, in a release, said that the acquisition cements TEPL's position as a key player in the Indian electronics manufacturing sector. In addition to TEPL acquiring a majority stake in Pegatron Technology India, the two companies will work on integrating their teams to work seamlessly. Announcing the acquisition of 60 per cent stake, Tata Electronics said Pegatron Technology India will undergo rebranding to reflect its new ownership structure and business direction while continuing to deliver high-quality electronics manufacturing services. This follows Tata Electronics' acquisition of Wistron's India operations (based in Narsapura, Karnataka) less than a year ago in March 2024, a move that furthered Tata Sons' Chairman, N Chandrasekaran's vision of significant investments by the Tata Group in electronics manufacturing. *—PTI*

RIL plans world's biggest AI data centre in India

RIL has acquired advanced AI semiconductors from Nvidia

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries is set to construct the world's largest data centre in Jamnagar, Gujarat, marking a significant move into India's burgeoning artificial intelligence (AI) sector, according to a Bloomberg News report.

Reliance has reportedly acquired advanced AI semiconductors from Nvidia, a global leader in AI technology. This follows their October 2024 announcement at the Nvidia AI Summit, where the two companies unveiled plans to collaborate on AI infrastructure. Nvidia will supply its cutting-edge Blackwell AI processors for a one-gigawatt data centre Reliance plans to establish.

At the summit, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang highlighted India's AI potential, saying, "India should manufacture its own AI. You should not export data to import intelligence." Mukesh Ambani echoed these sentiments, emphasising India's robust digital connectivity and its potential to use AI for widespread prosperity and equality.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang with Reliance CEO Mukesh Ambani ***PHOTO: X***

In September 2024, Reliance and Nvidia announced a partnership to develop AI supercomputers and large language models (LLMs) tailored to India's diverse languages. This collaboration reflects Reliance's ambition to address India's unique needs through AI. Nvidia also formed a similar alliance with the Tata Group, underscoring its commitment to India's AI-driven future.

India's growing AI

The Indian government has committed over Rs 10,000 crore to fund AI startups, projects, and LLM development. However, challenges remain, including the lack of domestic semiconductor production facilities. Establishing such plants requires significant investment, time, and specialized expertise, which India is still developing.

Despite these hurdles, Reliance's ambitious initiatives and partnerships with Nvidia and Tata highlight India's determination to become a global AI powerhouse, positioning the country as a key player in the evolving AI landscape. *—Agencies*

IN A MAJOR BLOW

SL revokes power purchase deal with Adani Group

COLOMBO, 24 JAN

In a major blow to the Adani Group, Sri Lanka has annulled a power purchase agreement with the Indian conglomerate following corruption allegations against its founder, Gautam Adani. The decision, confirmed by the country's energy ministry on 24 January, comes as President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's administration probes Adani's local projects after bribery accusations surfaced in the United States last year.

The previous Sri Lankan government had signed an agreement in May 2024 to buy electricity at $0.0826 per kilowatt-hour from a planned 484-megawatt Adani wind power plant in Mannar and Pooneryn. However, Dissanayake's cabinet recently decided to revoke the agreement, though the project itself remains under review.

"The government has terminated the power purchase agreement but not the project. A committee will assess its viability," an energy ministry official told AFP. Activists had opposed the deal, citing cheaper alternatives from smaller renewable energy providers.

The wind power project, valued at $442 million, is also under scrutiny in Sri Lanka's Supreme Court over environmental concerns. Official documents confirm that the cabinet has formed a panel to reassess the project, further complicating Adani's plans.

President Dissanayake, who took office in September, has prioritized fighting corruption and recovering hidden national assets. Adani, charged with bribery by US prosecutors in November 2024, has denied the allegations, calling them "baseless."

This marks another setback for the Adani Group, which has faced corporate fraud allegations and reputational damage in recent years. *—Agencies*

Adani hires firms to review US indictment

Adani group has appointed independent law firms to review the US indictment against its founder chairman Gautam Adani, his nephew and another key executive in a USD 265 million bribery case, according to a stock exchange filing by a group firm. Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL). *—PTI*

Markets snap two-day rally dragged by healthcare stocks

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to close with losses in a volatile session on Friday, snapping their two-day winning streak as investors pared exposure to realty, oil & gas and healthcare stocks amid a mixed trend in global markets.

Unabated foreign fund outflows also dented investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 329.92 points or 0.43 per cent to settle at 76,190.46. During the day, it slumped 428.63 points or 0.56 per cent to 76,091.75.

The NSE Nifty declined 113.15 points or 0.49 per cent to 23,092.20.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Mahindra & Mahindra, Zomato, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, Larsen & Toubro, UltraTech Cement, HDFC Bank, Adani Ports and Bajaj Finserv were among the major laggards.

On the other hand, Hindustan Unilever, Tech Mahindra, Nestle, Bharti Airtel and ICICI Bank were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 5,462.52 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

Sensex drops 329.92 points or 0.43 per cent to settle at 76,190.46; Nifty declines 113.15 points or 0.49 per cent to 23,092.20 ***PHOTO: X***

Paytm share price cracks over 8% on report of ED investigation

Paytm's share price dropped over 8 per cent on Friday after a report revealed that the company, along with seven other payment gateways, is under the Enforcement Directorate (ED) scanner for alleged involvement in a cryptocurrency scam. Paytm shares fell 8.84 per cent to Rs 773.90 on the BSE. According to the Times of India, the ED is investigating One 97 Communications, Paytm's parent company, freezing around Rs 500 crore in virtual accounts over two years. The scam, linked to the HPZ Token app, allegedly involved 10 Chinese nationals who collected Rs 2,200 crore across 20 states. Paytm clarified it has not received any ED notice, adding the matter concerns earlier third-party merchant inquiries. *—Agencies*

'USED-CAR SALES IN INDIA TO CROSS 1CR MARK BY 2030'

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Indian used-car market is expected to cross 1 crore sales mark annually by 2030 with offtakes increasing across both urban and smaller towns, according to a report by CARS24.

As per the 'Gear of Growth: The 2024 Indian Used-Car Market Report', Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi are driving the country's used-car boom.

As the customer preferences change for more affordable and dependable options, the used-car market is witnessing an uptick vis-a-vis the new car market, he added.

As per the report, SUVs continue to dominate the used car market with a share of 16.7 per cent in 2024.

Their spacious design, versatility, and premium appeal make them a favourite across both urban and rural markets, it noted.

The report highlighted that the post-COVID era has seen a significant shift in consumer preferences, with 12 per cent of car buyers prioritising personal mobility for convenience and safety over shared transportation.

Maruti Suzuki Swift has become the most sought-after model across both metro and non-metro cities, the report said. *—PTI*

WEF 2025: MMRDA signs 11 MoUs worth $40 billion

DAVOS, 24 JAN

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has signed 11 pivotal Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth USD 40 billion (Rs 3.5 lakh crore) at the prestigious World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

These investments, spanning urban transport, regional development, and cutting-edge technologies, will serve as a cornerstone for economic growth and enhanced quality of life in the region over the next 3-5 years, according to an official release.

Marking its golden jubilee, MMRDA celebrated 50 years of transformative growth both locally and globally.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis congratulated MMRDA, while Deputy Chief Minister and MMRDA Chairman Eknath Shinde commended its contributions. "Securing USD 40 billion in investments on this momentous occasion showcased MMRDA's international stature and its commitment to driving growth and innovation in the Mumbai Metropolitan Regio.

The MoUs are part of MMRDA's broader vision to align with the goals outlined by NITI Aayog and the Government of Maharashtra, the release read. *—ANI*

Tax collections projected to reach ₹28.2T in FY26

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The government's tax collections are expected to remain healthy in the financial year 2025-26 (FY26), according to CareEdge Ratings.

Gross tax revenue is projected to grow by 10.4 per cent, slightly higher than the estimated nominal GDP growth of 10.3 per cent. This would result in a tax buoyancy of 1 for the year.

The report highlighted that direct tax collections may grow at a slower pace in FY26 due to lower income tax collections, likely caused by potential tax relief measures.

For FY26, the net tax revenue is estimated at Rs 28.2 trillion, with gross tax revenue at Rs 41.4 trillion. The projections underline the importance of sustained economic recovery and effective revenue measures in fiscal goals.

The report also stated that the Indirect tax revenue is anticipated to grow by 11.9 per cent in FY26, reaching Rs 18.1 trillion. *—ANI*

Crop protection firms seek tax cuts in Budget

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

CropLife India on Friday urged the government to reduce goods and services tax (GST) on agrochemicals to 12 per cent and maintain a uniform 10 per cent basic customs duty for technical raw materials and formulations in its upcoming Budget proposal.

The industry body also demanded a 200 per cent weighted deduction on research and development (R&D) expenses for agrochemical companies and requested fund allocation to strengthen agricultural extension mechanisms.

"We request the government to create an ecosystem around a science-based, progressive, and predictive regulatory framework that will allow the sector to become globally competitive," the industry body said in a statement.

Key demands include: lowering GST from 18 per cent to 12 per cent, maintaining uniform 10 per cent customs duty for both technical raw material and formulations, providing a 200 per cent R&D expense deduction and extending R&D benefits to units with a minimum Rs 50 crore fixed assets and Rs 10 crore annual R&D spending.

The industry body warned that increasing customs duty to 30 per cent would make crop protection products less affordable for smallholder farmers and restrict access to newer, greener formulations critical for addressing climate challenges. *—PTI*

CropLife India urged the government to reduce goods and services tax (GST) on agrochemicals to 12 per cent and maintain a uniform 10 per cent basic customs duty ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

BANK OF JAPAN RAISES RATE

World shares gain after S&P 500 climbs to record

HONG KONG, 24 JAN

World shares advanced Friday after US stocks rose to a record and the Bank of Japan raised its key lending rate.

Oil prices fell after US President Donald Trump called on oil-producing countries to reduce the price of crude, which would ease worries about inflation.

Markets showed little obvious reaction to Trump's most recent comments about imposing higher tariffs on products from China and other countries.

France's CAC 40 rose 0.9 per cent in early trading to 7,960.60, while Germany's DAX added 0.3 per cent to 21,478.43. Britain's FTSE 100 was nearly unchanged at 8,563.49.

The futures for the S&P 500 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average edged 0.1 per cent lower.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index lost less than 0.1 per cent to 39,931.98 after the central bank raised its benchmark rate to about 0.5 per cent from 0.25 per cent, as widely expected.

It is the highest level for the rate since 2008, as the Bank of Japan shifts out of a long spell of extreme low interest rates meant to spur more borrowing and spending.

Just before the BOJ's decision, statistics from the government showed the core inflation rate increased to 3 per cent year-on-year in December, reaching the highest level in 16 months and above the central bank's 2 per cent target.

The gains came amid relatively calm moves for Treasury yields in the US bond market. Big swings there in recent months have been shaking the stock market, particularly when rising worries about inflation and the US government's heavy debt send Treasury yields higher.

In other dealings Friday, US benchmark crude oil shed 9 cents to $74.53 per barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, was unchanged at $78.29 per barrel.

The euro rose to $1.0495 from $1.0416. *—PTI*

Oil prices fell after US President Donald Trump called on oil-producing countries to reduce the price of crude, which would ease worries about inflation ***PHOTO: PTI***

DR AGARWAL'S HEALTH CARE IPO OPENS ON 29 JAN

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Temasek Holdings and TPG-backed Dr Agarwal's Health Care, an eye care services provider, on Friday, said it has fixed a price band of Rs 382 to Rs 402 per share for its over Rs 3,027-crore initial public offering (IPO).

The firm's maiden public issue will be open for subscription from January 29 to January 31. The bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on January 28, the company announced.

The IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of up to Rs 300 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 6.78 crore equity shares worth Rs 2,727.26 crore by promoters and other selling shareholders at the upper end of the price band. This aggregates the total issue size to Rs 3,027.26 crore. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Sahaja's good run ends in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Sahaja Yamalapalli, who was holding India's fort in the singles event at the KPB Trust Women's Open, exited the ITF W100 event with a close quarterfinal defeat against eighth seed Sara Bejlek, who played the big points well, here Thursday. In a match that could have gone either way, the Czech girl scored a 6-4, 6-4 victory and set up a semifinal meeting with giant-killer Leolia Jeanjean, who scored a splendid come-from-behind win over second-seeded Rebecca Marino of Canada.The Frenchwoman won 3-6, 7-5, 7-5 in a marathon encounter lasting two hours and 37 minutes at the KSLTA courts.—*PTI*

Shammi Silva set to be re-elected SLC chief

COLOMBO, 24 JAN

Incumbent Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) President Shammi Silva is set to be re-elected to the top post for his third successive two-year term during the Board's Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held on 31 March. In the list of nominations declared by SLC's election committee for the election of office bearers for 2025-27, Silva will only face 'friendly fire' from his camp. Therefore, he is assured of re-election at the AGM on 31 March, according to analysts.—*PTI*

Germany extends Julian's contract till Euros 2028

LEIPZIG, 24 JAN

Germany extended head coach Julian Nagelsmann's contract on Friday as part of the ceremony to mark 125 years of the German Football Association (DFB). The contract is valid until 2028 and therefore also covers the upcoming European Championship in Great Britain and Ireland. The former FC Bayern head coach was appointed at the helm of the side in September 2023 and led the side to the quarterfinals of the 2024 Euros. "In September 2023, when I joined the DFB, I could not have imagined being a national coach beyond the home European Championship. Our big goal was a successful tournament. But I also couldn't have imagined back then what the national team meant to the people of Germany. How many hearts does it reach and move? "This great feedback that we all, not just me, get every day shows us that we are on the right path together—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Triple jumper Praveen Chithravel targets CWG gold

VIJAYANAGAR, 24 JAN

National record holder and Asian Games bronze medallist triple jumper Praveen Chithravel has set the target of winning gold in the Commonwealth Games to be held in Scotland next year. He is also looking to re-write his national record of 17.37m this season itself. The 23-year-old Chithravel finished fourth in the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games with an effort of 16.89m, while compatriots Eldhose Paul and Abdulla Aboobacker won gold and silver respectively. Bermuda's Jah-Nhai Perinchief won the bronze. "I'm fighting to achieve more, like the Olympics, World Championship, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, everything.—*PTI*

Ranji Trophy: Jadeja ends with 12 wickets against Delhi

Karnataka dominates Punjab with Smaran's double ton

RAJKOT, 31 OCT

Ravindra Jadeja was unplayable on a spinners' paradise and added another seven to his first innings five-for as Saurashtra all but ensured Delhi's exit from Ranji Trophy with a 10-wicket victory inside two days in Group D, here Friday.

The hosts pounded Delhi by dismissing them for a mere 94 in 25.2 overs

While the famed Indian batters were huge flops across games, all-rounder Jadeja showed why he is still menacing on tracks that offer significant help.

The hosts pounded Delhi by dismissing them for a mere 94 in 25.2 overs in their second innings. This was after Saurashtra did well enough to score 271. The 83-run first innings lead on a difficult track proved to be decisive. Saurashtra scored the required 12 runs in just 3.1 overs. The match lasted a little over 150 overs across two days.

After six rounds, Saurashtra (18 points) are back in the hunt to qualify for the knockout stages from Group D along with Tamil Nadu (19 from 5 games), who are in good position to win outright against Chandigarh (18 points from 5 games).

Delhi with 14 points have one home game left against Railways and even a seven-point win might not be enough if Saurashtra or Chandigarh manage outright wins in their last games.

The Rishabh Pant fans were left high and dry as he got out for 17 in the second essay after scoring 1. In the first innings, he had holed out in the deep trying to slog-sweep left-arm spinner Dharmendra Jadeja. In the second innings, the more famous Jadeja, Ravindra, brought him forward and extra bounce had him edge to Sheldon Jackson in the first slip. Saurashtra skipper Jaydev Unadkat had said before the game that they will prepare rank turner and go for seven points in their bid to make it to the knock-out stage.

Punjab skipper **Shubman Gill** endured a tough day as Karnataka posted a mammoth 475, built around Ravichandran Smaran's maiden first-class double ton that put the hosts firmly in the driver's seat in their Elite Group C Ranji Trophy match here Friday. After a poor show with the bat on the opening day, it was another difficult day for Gill on the field as his bowlers failed to apply pressure on the opposition.

Resuming on 199 for 4, overnight batter Smaran dominated proceedings with a superb 277-ball 203, almost single-handedly taking Punjab to a huge total.

Smaran's knock was the highlight of the day, with the next-best score being Abhinav Manohar's 34. Smaran anchored the innings as other batters chipped in with useful contributions before Karnataka was bowled out in 122.1 overs. In their second innings, Punjab were 24 for 2 in 13 overs and were trailing by 396 runs, with Gill holding the fort at 7 not out from 36 balls, and Jassinder Singh at the crease on zero. Haryana's Anuj Thakral shines with 6/31 against Bengal

At Bengaluru:
Punjab: 55 & 24-2 in 13 overs (Shubman Gill 7*; Prasidh Krishna 1/4)

Karnataka: 475 all out in 122.1 overs (R Smaran 203; Mayank Markande 3/53, Jassinder Singh 3/66). —*PTI*

SHARDUL, TANUSH RESCUE MUMBAI AGAINST J&K

A resolute Shardul Thakur played the rescue act to perfection for the star-studded but misfiring Mumbai, as his second first-class hundred brought the Ranji Trophy defending champions back from the brink in their Elite Group A clash against Jammu and Kashmir here on Friday. Having conceded a huge 86-run lead in the first innings, Mumbai were left tottering at 101/7 in the second innings when Thakur and Tanush Kotian put on a robust 173-run unbeaten stand for the eighth wicket to turn the tables on J&K. Mumbai reached 274/7 at stumps on Day Two, ahead by 188 runs with Thakur batting on 113 (119 balls, 13 fours) and Kotian on 58 not out off 119 balls with six fours. Thakur battled cramps on multiple occasions and made the most of a reprieve, offering yet another reminder of his gritty character. At Mumbai: Mumbai 120 & 274/7 in 67 overs (Shardul Thakur 113*, Tanush Kotian 58*; Auqib Nabi 3/69) lead Jammu and Kashmir 206 Shubham Khajuria 53 —PTI

PHOTO: PTI

INDIA KEEP AN EYE ON SHAMI'S FITNESS

CHENNAI, 24 JAN

Unruffled by the lingering fitness concerns surrounding Mohammed Shami, the well-oiled machine that is India's T20 team will be eyeing an encore of its opening game performance against a stunned England in the second game of a five-match series, here on Saturday.

India leads the rubber 1-0 after a seven-wicket victory at the Eden Gardens on Wednesday. The hosts would certainly want to see Shami in action but his inclusion in the eleven, as things stand now, will depend on further evaluation of his fitness. India might not ring in many major changes considering the series is just one match old. If Shami is indeed fit to make his international comeback since the 2023 World Cup final, then Nitish Kumar Reddy could make way for him.

Keeping in mind the character of Chepauk's pitch, two-time world champions England might look to reinforce the spin department, adding young leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed. It's not a matter of grave concern yet but skipper Suryakumar Yadav will be mindful that he has just two fifties in the previous 11 innings after the T20 World Cup final last year. *Match starts at 7 pm* —*PTI*

Englebert powers Soorma to Women's HIL finals

RANCHI, 24 JAN

Charlotte Englebert scored a hat-trick to power JSW Soorma Hockey Club to the final of the inaugural Women's Hockey India League with a 4-2 win over Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers here on Friday. With this victory, Soorma Hockey Club has set up the final clash against Odisha Warriors on Sunday. Englebert (1st, 17th, 47th minutes) scored a superb hat-trick, while Hina Bano (9th) pitched in with a goal in between the former's strikes. Captain Vandana Katariya (48th) and Shilpi Dabas (58th) found the back of the net in the last quarter for the Bengal Tigers. Englebert took the Tigers by surprise as soon as the game began by picking up a loose pass on top of the circle and thundered a shot past rival goalkeeper Grace O'Hanlon. Soorma, after gaining the early advantage in the game, maintained the pressure in the minutes that followed. Halfway through the quarter, Sharmila Devi found Hina Bano from the right wing, who dashed across her marker in front of the goal and squeezed the ball past Grace to double Soorma's lead. —*PTI*

Jannik Sinner reaches final, beats Ben Shelton in 3 sets

NEW DELHI, 6 JUNE

Jannik Sinner can join the likes of Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer as a back-to-back Australian Open men's singles champion on Sunday night after advancing to another final. Italy's world No.1 had an uncharacteristically tardy start, staved off two set points in the first, and even suffered from cramping before completing a 7-6 (7-2), 6-2, 6-2 victory over American Ben Shelton.

It was not a signature Sinner performance like 12 months ago when he dispatched 10-time winner Djokovic in the semi-finals, but he still advanced to face German Alex Zverev. Alot of tension today, slightly cramps, but he was also suffering today a little bit in his legs," Sinner said. —*PTI*

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Injured Djokovic quits mid-match, puts Zverev in final

MELBOURNE, 24 JAN

Spectators booed an injured Novak Djokovic as he left the court in Rod Laver Arena after quitting one set into his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev on Friday.

Dealing with what he said was a torn muscle, Djokovic lost the opener 7-6 (5) when he put a forehand volley into the net, then began shaking his head and immediately walked over to shake Zverev's hand. The 37-year-old Djokovic packed up his equipment and walked off toward the locker room, pausing to respond to the jeers by giving two thumbs-up. At his news conference, Djokovic said the pain in his taped left leg was "getting worse and worse." He hurt it during his quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz on Tuesday night.

"I knew," Djokovic said, "even if I won the first set, it would be a huge uphill battle for me."

Zverev consoles Djokovic after the Serb's retirement PHOTO: X

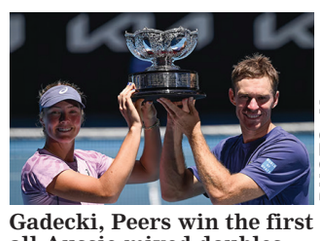


PHOTO: X

Gadecki, Peers win the first all-Aussie mixed doubles

Olivia Gadecki and John Peers combined for a 3-6, 6-4, 10-6 victory over John-Patrick Smith and Kimberly Birrell on Friday to win the first all-Aussie Australian Open mixed doubles final since 1967. The two wild-card pairings faced off on Rod Laver Arena to start the action on Day 13 at the year's first major. Gadecki hit an overhead winner to secure the match and claim her first major title. Peers added to his collection, which already included an Olympic gold medal, an Australian Open title in men's doubles, and a mixed doubles title at the 2022 U.S. Open. —*PTI*

Bumrah, Jadeja named in ICC Test Team of Year 2024

DUBAI, 6 JUNE

PHOTO: PTI

Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, and young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal deservedly found a place in the ICC's Test Team of the Year 2024 that featured four Englishmen with Australian Pat Cummins as its captain. The team also had two New Zealanders, including the redoubtable Kane Williamson. Cummins was the lone Australian to make the all-star XI. Bumrah was nothing short of magical in 2024, dominating every team and every batter he bowled to. He became the first bowler to average under 20 with a minimum of 200 wickets in Test cricket, solidifying his place in history.

In total, Bumrah took 71 wickets in 2024 at an astonishing average of 14.92, finishing as the highest wicket-taker in Test cricket for the year. Thirty-two of these scalps came in the recent Border-Gavaskar series against Australia, which India lost 1-3. He began the year with a stellar performance against England, taking 19 wickets in four matches

ICC Test Team of the Year 2024: Pat Cummins (c) (Australia), Yashasvi Jaiswal (India), Ben Duckett (England), Kane Williamson (New Zealand), Joe Root (England), Harry Brook (England), Kamindu Mendis (Sri Lanka), Jamie Smith (wk) (England), Ravindra Jadeja (India), Matt Henry (New Zealand), Jasprit Bumrah (India). —*PTI*

British Open to return to St. Andrews in 2027

ST ANDREWS, 24 JAN

One last chance for Tiger Woods?

PHOTO: X

The British Open is returning to St. Andrews in 2027, even pause when he crosses the Swilcan Bridge. The R&A announced Thursday the sport's oldest championship would return to the home of golf for the 31st time, the most of any links in the rotation. It was last held on the Old Course in 2022 when Cameron Smith won with a closing 64 in one of the great closing rounds of a major. Mark Darbon, who began as the new chief executive of the R&A last month, noted his excitement about his first announcement being a return to the Old Course. Woods feared his appearance in 2022, when he missed the cut, would be his last, not knowing when the Open would return to the Old Course. But so many of the greatest Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Tom Watson have stopped atop the stone Swilcan Bridge across the 18th fairway to soak it in and allow for commemorative photos. "Stop! Stop!" photographers yelled to Woods in 2022. Woods removed his cap a few steps before reaching the bridge, but he kept walking. Woods won at St. Andrews in 2000 during his sweep of the majors, an eight-shot victory that made him at age 24 the youngest player. —*PTI*

NO INDIAN IN MEN'S SIDE

Mandhana, Deepti in ICC women's ODI Team of the Year

DUBAI, 24 JAN

Deepti Sharma and Smriti Mandhana PHOTO: ANI

Star batter Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma were on Friday named in the ICC women's ODI Team of the Year 2024 but none of their male counterparts found a place in the men's side that was dominated by Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.The women's all-star team has three players from England, two Australians, two South Africans, and one each from Sri Lanka and West Indies, besides the two Indians.

South African batter Laura Wolvaardt, who scored 697 runs in 12 matches in 2024, was named captain of the ICC team.The men were, however, absent from the ICC XI and that can be attributed to the lack of ODI engagements for the country last year.

India played only three ODIs -- an away series against Sri Lanka --, losing two of them while the third one ended in a tie.The 28-year-old Mandhana accumulated 747 runs in 13 matches to be the highest run-scorer in women's ODIs in 2024. She is also in the running for the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award.In the home series against South Africa, Mandhana was in sublime form, beginning with back-to-back centuries in the first two ODIs. She narrowly missed a third consecutive ton, falling for 90, though her remarkable tally of 343 runs in the series earned her the Player-of-the-Series award. Mandhana had a shaky start in the first two ODIs against New Zealand in October but ended the series on a high note with a brilliant century in the final match. With this hundred, Mandhana became the most prolific century-maker for India in the Women's 50-over format. —*PTI*

Indian Grandmaster Iniyan wins title in Malaysia

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Indian Grandmaster Iniyan Panneerselvam clinched the 9th Johor International Open chess tournament title in Malaysia with a dominating performance. The 22-year-old from Erode in Tamil Nadu accumulated 8.5 points in nine games. He finished 1.5 points ahead of his nearest rival, winning against four International Masters and one Grandmaster.

The nine-round tournament, which ended on Thursday, had 84 participants from eight countries, out of which 24 were titled players.

In fact, at the end of the penultimate round where he beat Indonesian IM Nayaka Bodhidharma, Iniyan had already secured the title as he was 1.5 points ahead in the points table. Iniyan beat Vietnamese GM Nguyen Van Huy in the final round in an impressive performance.

Indian IM VS Raahul and Chinese IM Li Bo finished second and third respectively.

Iniyan, who had won the Chennai Open earlier in January, secured 15 rating points from the title win. —*PTI*